

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at Univision's "Encuentro con Barack Obama" Town Hall and a Question-and-Answer Session in Coral Gables, Florida

September 20, 2012

Univision Moderator Maria Elena Salinas. Let's welcome the President of the United States, Barack Obama.

The President. Jorge, como estas?

Univision Moderator Jorge Ramos. How are you?

The President. Good, thanks.

Mr. Ramos. Thanks for coming.

Ms. Salinas. Hello, Mr. President. How are you?

The President. Thank you.

Ms. Salinas. Welcome. Thank you for being here with us.

The President. Muchas gracias.

Attack on U.S. Mission in Benghazi, Libya/Situation in the Middle East

Ms. Salinas. Before we start, before talking about education and its future, we would like to talk about something that is happening right now in recent news. As we know, at the present time, 1,000 people are trying to get into the Embassy in Pakistan, and we have seen different protests, anti-American protests in dozens of countries.

We know in Libya, four Americans were killed. We know now that Ambassador Chris Stevens warned about security days before he passed—he was killed. Many people want to know whether—if you expected so much anti-American sentiment in the Islamic world. And why wasn't your administration better prepared to—with more security at our embassies on September 11?

The President. Well, first of all, obviously we mourn the loss of the Americans who were killed in Benghazi. But I think it's important to understand that that's not representative of the attitudes of the Libyan people towards America. Because they understand, because of the incredible work that our diplomats did as well as our men and women in uniform, we liberated that country from a dictator who had terrorized them for 40 years. And Chris Stevens, the Ambassador there, was one of the leaders of that process. So when he was killed, there were vigils in Libya, but also in front of the White House expressing the deep sorrow that the Libyan people felt towards them.

What we've seen over the last week, week and a half is something that actually we've seen in the past, where there is an offensive video or cartoon directed at the prophet Muhammad. And this is obviously something that then is used as an excuse by some to carry out inexcusable violent acts directed at Westerners or Americans.

And my number-one priority is always to keep our diplomats safe and to keep our Embassies safe. And so when the initial events happened in Cairo and all across the region, we worked with Secretary Clinton to redouble our security and to send a message to the leaders of

these countries essentially saying, although we had nothing to do with the video, we find it offensive, it's not representative of America's views, how we treat each other with respect when it comes to their religious beliefs, but we will not tolerate violence.

And our goal now is not only to make sure that our Embassies and our diplomats are safe, but also to make sure that we bring those who carried out these events to justice.

There is a larger issue, and that is, what's going to be happening in the Arab Spring as these countries transition from dictatorship to democracy. And we cannot replace the tyranny of a dictator with the tyranny of a mob. And so my message to the Presidents of Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and these other countries is, we want to be a partner with you, we will work with you, and we stand on the side of democracy, but democracy is not just an election; it's also, are you looking out for minority rights, are you respecting freedom of speech, are you treating women fairly.

All these issues are ones that the region is going to wrestle with. The one thing we can't do is withdraw from the region, because the United States continues to be the one indispensable nation. And even countries where the United States is criticized, they still want our leadership, and they still look to us to make sure that we're providing opportunity and peace. And so we're going to continue to work in these regions.

Attack on U.S. Mission in Benghazi, Libya/Al Qaida Terrorist Organization

Ms. Salinas. We have reports that the White House said today that the attacks in Libya were a terrorist attack. Do you have information indicating that it was Iran or Al Qaida was behind organizing the protests?

The President. Well, we're still doing an investigation, and there are going to be different circumstances in different countries. And so I don't want to speak to something until we have all the information. What we do know is that the natural protests that arose because of the outrage over the video were used as an excuse by extremists to see if they can also directly harm U.S. interests——

Ms. Salinas. Al Qaida?

The President. Well, we don't know yet. And so we're going to continue to investigate this. We've insisted on and have received so far full cooperation from countries like Egypt and Libya and Tunisia in not only protecting our diplomatic posts, but also to make sure that we discover who, in fact, is trying to take advantage of this.

But this is part of the reason why we have to remain vigilant. Look, when I came into office, I said I would end the war in Iraq, and I did. I said that we would begin transitioning in Afghanistan so that over time Afghans can take responsibility for their own security. But what I also said was we're going to have to focus narrowly and forcefully on groups like Al Qaida, the ones that carried out the 9/11 attacks and the ones that still threaten U.S. interests.

And those forces have not gone away. We've decimated Al Qaida's top leadership in the border regions around Pakistan, but in Yemen, in Libya, in other of these places—increasingly, in places like Syria—what you see is these elements that don't have the same capacity that a bin Laden or core Al Qaida had, but can still cause a lot of damage, and we've got to make sure that we remain vigilant and are focused on preventing them from doing us any harm.

President's Policy Agenda/National Economy/Immigration Reform

Mr. Ramos. Mr. President, I want to ask you something that is known as the "Obama promise," and you knew that I was going to ask you about that. On May 28, 2008, we had a conversation in Denver, Colorado, and you told me the following—and I'm going to quote you: "But I can guarantee that we will have, in the first year, an immigration bill that I strongly support."

I want to emphasize "the first year." At the beginning of your Government, you had control of both Chambers of Congress, and yet you did not introduce immigration reform. And before I continue, I want for you to acknowledge that you did not keep your promise.

The President. Well, let me first of all, Jorge, make a point that when we talked about immigration reform in the first year, that's before the economy was on the verge of collapse. Lehman Brothers had collapsed, the stock market was collapsing. And so my first priority was making sure that we prevented us from going into a great depression.

And I think everybody here remembers where we were 4 years ago. We lost 800,000 jobs the month that I took office. Small businesses and big businesses couldn't get financed. People had seen their 401(k)s evaporate. People were losing homes left and right.

And so we had to take a whole series of emergency actions to make sure that we put people back to work, cutting taxes for middle class families and small businesses so that they could stay open or pay the bills, making sure that States got assistance so they didn't have to lay off teachers and firefighters and police officers, saving an auto industry that was on the brink of collapse.

And so that took up a huge amount of time in the first year. But even in that first year, one of my first acts was to invite every single Member of Congress who had previously been supportive of comprehensive immigration reform and to say to them, we need to get this done. This is something I believe in deeply, because we are a nation of laws and we're a nation of immigrants. And I am willing to work with anybody to strengthen our border security and to crack down on employers who are taking advantage of undocumented workers, but what we also have to do is provide a pathway for all those millions of hard-working people who are simply here looking after their families, and oftentimes they've put deep roots in this country.

And what I confess I did not expect—and so I'm happy to take responsibility for being naive here—is that Republicans who had previously supported comprehensive immigration reform—my opponent in 2008, who had been a champion of it and who attended these meetings—suddenly would walk away. That's what I did not anticipate.

And as you know, Jorge, even though we controlled the House of Representatives, even though we had a majority in the Senate, the way the Senate operates was if you couldn't get 60 votes, you couldn't get something moving. So we initiated the meetings, had a series of meetings. And what we could not get was a single Republican, including the 20 who had previously voted for comprehensive immigration reform, to step up and say, we will work with you to make this happen.

Immigration Reform

Mr. Ramos. But it was a promise, Mr. President. And I am going to explain this, because this is very important, and I don't want it to get lost in translation. You promised that. And a promise is a promise. And with all due respect, but you didn't keep that promise.

The President. Well, here is what I would say, Jorge, is that—and we've had this conversation before—there's the thinking that the President is somebody who is all powerful

and can get everything done. In our branch of—in our system of Government, I am the head of the executive branch. I'm not the head of the Legislature; I'm not the head of the judiciary. We have to have cooperation from all these sources in order to get something done. And so I am happy to take responsibility for the fact that we didn't get it done, but I did not make a promise that I would get everything done, a hundred percent, when I was elected as President.

What I promised was that I would work every single day as hard as I can to make sure that everybody in this country, regardless of who they are, what they look like, where they come from, that they would have a fair shot at the American Dream. And I have—that promise I've kept.

And what I've also—I think is relevant for today's session is the fact that I have never wavered in my support of comprehensive immigration reform. We did put forward a "DREAM Act" that was passed in the House, got the overwhelming majority of support from Democrats in the Senate, and was blocked by the Republican Party.

We now are confronted with a choice between two candidates in which the candidate sitting here with you today is committed to comprehensive immigration reform, is committed to the "DREAM Act," has taken administrative actions to prevent young people from being deported. And that stands in contrast with the other candidate, who has said he would veto the "DREAM Act," that he is uncertain about what his plan for immigration reform would be, and whose—considers the Arizona law a model for the Nation and has suggested that the main solution for immigration is self-deportation.

So the issue here for voters: Whose vision best represents the aspirations not just of the Latino community, but of all Americans who believe that we are a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants? And that candidate, I believe, is talking to you right now.

Bipartisanship/Immigration Reform

Mr. Ramos. I'm going to ask you something besides me—because you promised that on Facebook—and we have received the question on Facebook. Tony Castillo asked you this: If you are reelected, do you think you'll be able to have immigration reform even though there's a majority of Republican Chamber of Representatives? How can you promise the same thing if you're not going to be able to do that?

The President. Well, first of all, I'm not going to concede that Republicans necessarily are controlling the Congress. That's why we have elections, so—[*applause*].

But let's assume that the Republicans do retain the House, let's say. What I can—what I'm absolutely certain of is if the Latino community and the American community that cares about this issue turns out to vote, they can send a message that this is not something to use as a political football, that people's lives are at stake, that this is a problem that we can solve and historically has had bipartisan support.

And I actually think the mindset within the Republican Party can change. Because when you think about it, not only was it fairly recently that we had some Republican support, but even now you have voices like the former Governor of Florida, Jeb Bush, who has said that the Republican Party has taken an extreme view, a wrong approach when it comes to immigration reform.

So my hope is, is that after the election—when the number-one goal is no longer beating me, but hopefully, the number-one goal is solving the country's problems—if they have seen

that people who care about this issue have turned out in strong numbers, that they will rethink it, if not because it's the right thing to do, at least because it's in their political interest to do so.

Enforcement of Immigration Laws/Immigration Reform

Ms. Salinas. Mr. President, you have been the President who has made the largest number of deportations in modern history—more than 1.5 million so far. You've separated many families. There are more than 5,000 children who are American citizens in foster care and in the adoption process. Would you just—since you've granted deferred action, would you like to do something—consider doing something similar to other groups of noncriminal undocumented immigrants such as the parents of U.S.-born children?

The President. Well, let me describe sort of how we've tried to approach this given that we haven't gotten comprehensive immigration reform done yet. My instructions to the Department of Homeland Security has been that we have to focus our attention, our enforcement, on people who genuinely pose a threat to our communities, not to hard-working families who are minding their own business and oftentimes have members of their family who are U.S. citizens, because that's a priority in terms of limited enforcement resources. We don't have the capacity to enforce across the board when you're talking about millions of people. And we've done that.

So more than half of our enforcement now is directed at people with criminal records. Of the remaining half, about two-thirds are actually people who are typically apprehended close to the border, so these are not people who have longstanding roots in our community. And what we've tried to do then is focus our attention on real threats and make sure that families of the sort that you describe are not the targets of DHS resources.

Now, what I've always said is, as the head of the executive branch, there's a limit to what I can do. Part of the reason that deportations went up was Congress put a whole lot of money into it, and when you have a lot of resources and a lot more agents involved, then there are going to be higher numbers. What we've said is, let's make sure that you're not misdirecting those resources. But we're still going to ultimately have to change the laws in order to avoid some of the heartbreaking stories that you see coming up occasionally. And that's why this continues to be a top priority of mine.

The steps we've taken with the "DREAM Act" kids, one of the great things about it is to see that the country as a whole has actually agreed with us on this. There—the voices in the Republican Party have been very critical, but the good news is, is that the majority of Americans have said, you know what, if somebody is—lives here, has gone to school here, pledges allegiance to our flag, this is the only country they've known, they shouldn't be sent away. We should embrace them and say we want you to help build this country.

So we've got public opinion on our side on that issue. And we will continue to make sure that how we enforce is done as fairly and justly as possible. But until we have a law in place that provides a pathway for legalization and/or citizenship for the folks in question, we're going to be—continue to be bound by the law. And that's a challenge.

Enforcement of Immigration Laws

Ms. Salinas. Mr. President, the fact that you announced—you mentioned the deferred action was granted months before the election has led some of your critics to say that it was just only to win the Hispanic vote. Why didn't you do that earlier during your presidency?

The President. Well, I think if you take a look at the polls, I was winning the Latino vote before we took that action, partly because the other side had completely abandoned their commitment to things like comprehensive immigration reform.

But I did this because I met young people all across the country, wonderful kids who sometimes were valedictorians, were—participate in the community, had aspirations to go to college, some who were serving in our military, and if you heard their stories, there's no way that you would think it was fair or just for us to have them suffering under a cloud of deportation.

And so part of the challenge as President is constantly saying, what authorities do I have? What we wanted to do was first make sure that we were directing our enforcement resources towards criminals, and we've done that. And after we had put that system in place, we said, you know what, we're still hearing stories of young people being scared about being deported; it's time to see if we can take even further action. And that's what we've done.

Ms. Salinas. Thank you.

Mr. Ramos. Mr. President, now we are going to talk about education. One out of 10 Hispanics—only 1 out of 10 graduates from college. And you know that one out of three, not even 25 percent, finishes high school. And this is a question from Maria Menda:

College Affordability/Education Reform/Minority Student Dropout Rate

Q. Thank you. First of all, I want to say, Mr. President, it's an honor for me to be here to—and my name is Ana Maria Menda, and I'm a candidate to a doctorate in special education studies at university level. So I would like to know, what do you attribute the dropout rate among Hispanics in the United States—15 percent—and what plans do you have to change that?

The President. Well, first of all, one of my most important plans is to make sure that people like you can continue your studies and help solve the problem. And that's why we've put such a big emphasis on making sure that college is affordable.

And some of the work that we've done over the last 4 years to make sure that the student interest—student loan interest rate stays low, expanding Pell grants for millions of students, including millions of Latino students, so that we are seeing the highest college enrollment rate among Latino students in history, all that is going to help to contribute to us being able to deal with the problem of secondary and high school educations. Because you're going to be inspiring a whole lot of students to say, I can do that too, I can achieve that dream.

Now, one of the things we know is going to make a big difference is early childhood education. So we've put enormous effort not only in providing additional funding for early childhood education, but also to improve the quality of early childhood education, because not all programs work perfectly.

We've also been very proud to be able to initiate reform in 46 States around the country—almost every State has initiated reforms—because what we've said is we'll give you more money if you initiate reforms that focus on dropout rates, that focus on some of the hardest to reach students, that focus on getting great teachers in the classroom and holding yourself to high standards and accountability.

So we've seen already gains in math and science in many of these schools. We've given additional dollars to some schools, predominantly Latino and African American, where the

dropout rate is sky high. And we've said, in some cases, you may just have to rework the school entirely. Get in—get a great principal in there, hire wonderful teachers, and we will provide you additional help.

Now, for those of you who care deeply about education—because education was a gateway of opportunity for me, for Michelle, and for many of the people sitting here—this should be a vital decision that guides you in this upcoming election. Because even as we've done all this work to make sure that college is more affordable, that we're reforming our schools, what you've seen on the other side and what's been proposed by my opponent is a budget that would cut 20 percent of education funding, that would roll back tax credits that we're providing to middle class families to help them send their kids to college, that would put billions of dollars back into the hands of banks as middlemen for the student loan program, which would then eliminate or reduce funding for Pell grants for millions of students around the country.

So across the board, what you'll hear from my opponent and from some of his allies in Congress is, we care deeply about education, but they don't put their money where their mouth is. Their budget doesn't reflect those values.

And I'm a firm believer that money alone can't solve the problem. Parents, we have to make sure that we're turning off the TV and providing a quiet space for our kids to do their homework. Teachers have to inspire. Principals have to lead. But ultimately, along with reform efforts, we also have to make sure that we don't have overcrowded classrooms and textbooks that are outdated.

I was in Las Vegas talking to some wonderful teachers in a predominantly Latino district, and the teachers were telling me, at the start of school we've got 42 kids in the classroom. Some kids are sitting on the floor until they eventually get reassigned. They lose 2 weeks of instruction time just because the classrooms are so overcrowded. There are schools, particularly in Latino communities, all across this country where kids are still studying in trailers. They don't have regular classrooms, textbooks that are decades old.

Now, if we truly believe that education is the key not only for opportunity, but also for making sure we can compete in this 21st-century economy, that is not a tolerable situation. And I've put forward specific plans, with the budget behind it, to deal with these issues. And my opponent would actually roll back the progress that we've already made.

Ms. Salinas. Mr. President, we have time, but we have many more questions. We're going to take a break, and then we'll be right back with many of the most important questions that Hispanics want to ask to the President, Barack Obama.

[At this point, a commercial break was taken.]

Mr. Ramos. We'll continue with this special program right here because the debate commission didn't want to have any Hispanic or African American journalists. So we decided to have our own meeting.

The President. We're thrilled to be here.

Ms. Salinas. Thank you, Mr. President. We have an education question. Well, I think that it's something that reminded—problems our country has was the recent strike of 29,000 teachers that were—left 350,000 students out of school, and we have a question about that. This is a Facebook question. It is from Carlos Tafoya, and this is his question: What is your

plan to solve the present education crisis? What happened in Chicago could also happen in California and other States very soon. Are you concerned about that?

Teachers/Education Funding

The President. Well, obviously what happened in Chicago was of concern, and we're glad that it finally got resolved. But you're going to see school districts all across the country dealing with this issue because part of what has happened over the last 4 years is a lot of teacher layoffs.

Now, when I first came into office, one of the most important things that we had to do was to help States and local communities not lay off teachers. And that was part of what the Recovery Act was all about, was providing States with help. Because we can't afford to be laying off teachers when other countries are hiring teachers.

Unfortunately, though, we've still seen a lot of school districts lay off teachers. That has an impact on the students themselves because when you have larger classes, it's harder to provide the individualized attention on those kids, especially at the younger grades.

This is, again, why the difference between the two candidates in this election is so important. If Governor Romney's and Congressman Ryan's budgets were introduced, you would see even less—by a magnitude of 20 percent—even less resources from the Federal Government to the States, and you could see potentially even more teachers being laid off, working conditions for teachers becoming worse, potentially more strikes.

And what we say to school districts all across the country is, we will provide you more help as long as you're being accountable. And as far as teachers go, I think they work as hard as anybody, but we also want to make sure that they are having high standards of performance, especially in math and science. So one of the plans that I presented at the convention was I want to hire a hundred thousand new math and science teachers, because that's how teachers do better, students do better, the likelihood of strikes become lower.

Mr. Ramos. Mr. President, I know you had the opportunity to watch our conversation with Mitt Romney yesterday, but previously in a video, he has said that he was not concerned about the 47 percent of the population in the United States. But yesterday he said that he wanted to be the President of a hundred percent of Americans. For you, which is the two of the true Mitt Romney? [*Laughter*]

2012 Presidential Election/Tax Rates

The President. Well, here's what I would say. First of all, I've been President now for almost 4 years. But the day I was elected, that night in Grant Park where I spoke to the country, I said, 47 percent of the people didn't vote for me, but I've heard your voices, and I'm going to work just as hard for you as I did for those who did vote for me. That's how you have to operate as a President. I truly believe that.

I think your question, Jorge, about what's the real Mitt Romney is better directed to Mr. Romney. But I will say this. When you have—when you express an attitude that half the country considers itself victims, that somehow they want to be dependent on government, my thinking is maybe you haven't gotten around a lot, because I travel around the country all the time and the American people are the hardest working there are.

And their problem is not that they're not working hard enough or they don't want to work or they're being taxed too little or they just want to loaf around and gather government checks. We've gone through a challenging time. People want a hand up, not a handout.

Are there people who abuse the system? Yes, both at the bottom and at the top—because there are a whole bunch of millionaires who aren't paying taxes at all either. But when you look—last point I'd make—when you look statistically, it turns out that even if people aren't paying income taxes, they're paying payroll taxes. They're paying gas taxes. They're paying sales taxes. They're paying State and local taxes.

So the fact of the matter is that the few people who are not paying—the people who are not paying income taxes are either paying a lot of taxes because they're working every day, but they just don't make enough money overall to pay income tax, or alternatively, they're senior citizens, or they're students who—I know these guys aren't making a lot of money—*[laughter]*—even with some work-study programs. Or they're disabled, or in some cases, they're veterans or soldiers who are fighting for us right now overseas—they don't pay an income tax.

And so I just think it's very important for us to understand Americans work hard, and if they're not working right now, I promise you they want to get to work. And that's what my economic plan is designed to do, to get more people back to work and to lift up the middle class and people who want to work to get into the middle class.

Mr. Ramos. I wanted to talk about politics, but now Arianne Alcorta has a question for you. Arriane, go ahead.

Employment Opportunities for Minority Women/College Affordability

Q. Mr. President, my name is Arianne Alcorta, and I'm a student from—I'm a student at the journalism school at UM. This is my question to you: What would you recommend to Latina women such—I—in order to be successful in my search for employment in the United States?

The President. Well, first of all, you've got great role models here in journalism. The—particularly Maria Elena. Jorge's just—*[laughter]*.

Ms. Salinas. Thank you. Because I ask you the tough questions.

The President. But look, the economy has been very tough for the last 4 years, and so there are a lot of young people out there who've graduated, have a great education, but have still had trouble getting work. The good news is over the last 30 months we've seen job growth every single month—4½ million new jobs.

The most important thing you can do, the best investment you can make to make sure you have a good job, is to get a college education. So what you're doing now cuts in half the likelihood that you end up unemployed.

The most important message I guess I would tell you, though, is what I tell my daughters, which is, America remains a country where, if you work hard and you don't give up and you are persistent, you can succeed. And the good news is that because of some of the battles that were fought before you were born and, in some cases, before I was born, opportunity is opening up for more and more people: for women, for Latinas, Latinos, for African Americans. So you can go as far as your dreams will take you.

The big concern that I have is making sure that as you're paying for your education, you don't get burdened with tons of debt. And that's why we focus so much on taking billions of dollars that were going to banks and making sure that we cut out the middlemen, provide some of these loans directly to students, or grants directly to students. And now we're working with colleges and universities to keep tuition lower in order to make sure that when you get that first job, it may not pay everything you want—my first job, by the way, I made \$10,000 a year.

So there's nothing wrong with taking a job that doesn't pay a lot if it's what you're interested in, as long as you don't have these huge debt burdens that so many young people have now. And that's a big contrast in this election.

Drug-Related Violence in Mexico

Ms. Salinas. Mr. President, we have a question that is very important for us and also our neighbors in Mexico. You have supported President Calderon's policy against drug trafficking. Now, there's a new President—Enrique Pena Nieto will be taking office at the same time if you were to win. So do you think that after 65,000 deaths it's time to change the strategy? Can you consider the 65,000 deaths a failure and the policy should change?

The President. Well, obviously, there has been an extraordinary battle within Mexico to try to gain control over territories that, in some cases, have been just terrorized by these drug cartels. And I commend President Calderon for his courage in standing up to these cartels, and we have worked very closely and cooperatively with them in dealing with this issue.

Now, what I will be saying to the new President of Mexico when he takes office is that we want to continue that cooperation, and we recognize this is a threat on both sides of the border. We make a mistake if we just say this is Mexico's problem because we obviously generate a lot of demand for drugs in this country, and guns and cash flow south at the same time as drugs flow north. That's why——

Ms. Salinas. How many more people have to die before the strategy changes?

The President. Well, what we need to do is to weaken the grip of these drug cartels, and there are a couple of things we can do. Number one, the United States can focus on drug treatment and prevention and helping people deal with addiction, making sure that young people are not getting hooked on drugs. If we can reduce demand, that means less cash flowing into these drug cartels. And we have actually beefed up our investment and support of prevention, because we have to treat this as a public health problem here in the United States, not just a law enforcement problem.

The other thing that we've tried to do is to work much more aggressively in preventing the flow of guns and cash down into Mexico. And so interdiction has to work both ways.

But ultimately, Mexico is also going to have to come to terms with the fact that in some communities and in some cities, law enforcement has been outgunned or compromised by the strength of these drug cartels. And we want to help them, but they're going to also have to take action to continue to keep pressure on these drug cartels. And that includes not just police, by the way; it also means the judiciary, their prosecutors, that if they capture drug kingpins, that they actually stay in jail.

There's a whole series of issues involved in law enforcement, and we're providing them advice, but ultimately, they're a sovereign country, and they're going to have to take some of those steps as well. But we want to be partners with them throughout this process.

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' Fast and Furious Program

Mr. Ramos. Thank you. Mr. President, you told me during an interview that you—Eddie Holder or you did not authorize the Fast and Furious operation that allowed 2,000 weapons from the United States to Mexico, and they were in the drug trafficking hands. And I think that up—200 Mexicans might have died, and also American agent Brian Terry. There's a report that 14 agents were responsible for the operation. But shouldn't Attorney General Eric Holder—he should have known about that. And if he didn't, should you fire him?

The President. Well, first of all, I think it's important for us to understand that the Fast and Furious program was a field-initiated program begun under the previous administration. When Eric Holder found out about it, he discontinued it. We assigned a Inspector General to do a thorough report that was just issued, confirming that, in fact, Eric Holder did not know about this, that he took prompt action, and the people who did initiate this were held accountable.

But what I think is most important is recognizing that we've got a challenge in terms of weapons flowing south. And the strategy that was pursued, obviously, out of Arizona was completely wrongheaded. Those folks who were responsible have been held accountable. The question now is, how do we move forward with a strategy that will actually work?

And we are going to have to work with Mexican law enforcement to accomplish this. But I will tell you that Eric Holder has my complete confidence because he has shown himself to be willing to hold accountable those who took these actions and is passionate about making sure that we're preventing guns from getting into the wrong hands.

Mr. Ramos. But if you have nothing to hide, then why are you not releasing papers to this?

The President. Well, actually, the truth is we've released thousands of papers——

Mr. Ramos. But not all of them.

The President. Well, we've released almost all of them. The ones that we don't release typically relate to internal communications that were not related to the actual Fast and Furious operation.

And so the challenge that we have is that at any given moment in the Federal Government, there may be people who do dumb things. And I've seen it, I promise. [Laughter] And ultimately, I'm responsible, and my key managers, including the Attorney General, are responsible, for holding those people accountable, for making sure that they are fired if they do dumb things, and then fixing the system to ensure that it doesn't happen again. And I'm very confident that you will not see any kind of actions like this in the future.

But what I don't like to see is these kinds of issues becoming political circuses or ways to score political points in Congress, partly because it becomes a distraction from us doing the business that we need to do with the—for the American people.

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives's Fast and Furious Program/Gun Control

Ms. Salinas. Very briefly, talking about the same question, you know, we have just one minute left. Why don't—let's have an independent investigation? Because at the end of the day, it was the Justice Department investigating the—its boss and saying that he's not at fault. Why don't we have—very briefly—independent investigation that is not from the Justice Department?

The President. Oh, Maria Elena, understand that not only have we had multiple hearings in Congress, but the Inspector General is put in place specifically to be independent from the Attorney General. And this Attorney General's report was not a whitewash in any way. I mean, it was tough on the Justice Department. And it indicated that potentially more supervision was needed; people should have known in some cases, even if they didn't actually know. So it was, I think, independent, honest. It was a clear assessment of what had gone wrong in that situation.

And we are happy to continue to provide the information that is relevant to this. But one of the things that happens in Washington is, very quickly these issues become political distractions as opposed to us actually solving the problems that we need to solve. And this issue of guns flowing south is a hard issue to solve. Because this country respects the Second Amendment; we want to protect the rights of gun owners and those who are seeking to purchase firearms. But oftentimes, that's exploited as well. And so we've got to make sure that we're properly balancing the rights of U.S. citizens, but making sure that we're also interdicting those arms that would get into the hands of criminals.

Mr. Ramos. Mr. President, thank you so much. We're going to have a last break and then we're going to continue with a meeting with President Barack Obama. Thank you so much.

[A commercial break was taken.]

Immigration Reform/Tone of U.S. Politics/Engagement with American Public

Ms. Salinas. Let's continue with a last conversation.

Mr. Ramos. There's something different, something personal. I don't know what you're reading before going to sleep right now. I don't know if you have already read the book "No Easy Day," in which a Navy SEAL tells the story of how Usama bin Laden was killed. According to many, his death was your biggest achievement. What is your biggest failure?

The President. Well, Jorge, as you remind me, my biggest failure so far is we haven't gotten comprehensive immigration reform done. [Laughter] So we're going to be continuing to work on that. But it's not for lack of trying or desire, and I'm confident we're going to accomplish that.

You know what I—obviously, the fact that we haven't been able to change the tone in Washington is disappointing. We know now that as soon as I came into office you already had meetings among some of our Republican colleagues saying, how do we figure out how to beat the President? And I think that I've learned some lessons over the last 4 years, and the most important lesson I've learned is that you can't change Washington from the inside. You can only change it from the outside. That's how I got elected, and that's how the big accomplishments like health care got done, was because we mobilized the American people to speak out. That's how we were able to cut taxes for middle class families.

So something that I'd really like to concentrate on in my second term is being in a much more constant conversation with the American people so that they can put pressure on Congress to help move some of these issues forward.

2012 Presidential Election/Immigration Reform

Ms. Salinas. Yes, as you said, that's your biggest failure, and Jorge asked you if you consider that you broke your promise. So I think that the answer is, yes, with many excuses, but you actually broke your promise.

The President. Well, the—what I will say this—what I'll say is this, that I haven't gotten everything done that I wanted to get done. And that's why I'm running for a second term, because we've still got more work to do, and I'm—[*applause*].

The good news is I think that we can build on the progress that we've made. The actions we took in terms of deferred action give us the basis now to get something done for the DREAMers, to get comprehensive immigration reform done.

The progress that we've made in helping young people finance their college educations serves as a basis for us to continue to try to bring tuition down and college graduation rates up. The 4½ million jobs that we've already created gives us the basis for us now doubling down on manufacturing and making sure that community colleges are training people for the jobs that are out there right now. The opportunities that we have in implementing health care, which is going to be providing millions of Americans, including millions of Latinos, for the first time, who've worked so hard, the peace of mind of knowing that they have affordable health care.

All those issues are ones that we're very proud of, but we know we're not done yet. And that's exactly why this election is going to be so important.

Ms. Salinas. Mr. President, thank you so much for spending this hour with us. And as we said it yesterday, we did the same with Mitt Romney, and we want to give you the opportunity for you to talk to our audience on camera. So you can talk to Hispanics in the——

The President. Well——

Ms. Salinas. ——so to try to convince them, for them to vote for you.

The President. ——it is my pleasure. Thank you so much for the time that you've given me and for this audience. And "the U," Miami, thank you. We appreciate you.

I truly believe this is the most important election of our lifetimes. We've gone through some very tough times together over these last 4 years. But now we've got a choice about how we move forward.

My opponents, they think that if we provide tax cuts to folks at the very top, that somehow that's going to result in jobs and opportunity for everybody. I've got a different philosophy. What I believe is, is that our economy grows best when it grows from the middle out and the bottom up, when everybody's got a fair shot and everybody's doing their fair share and everybody's playing by the same rules.

And so the plan that I've put forward in terms of making sure that we are creating a million manufacturing jobs, that we're providing tax breaks to companies that are investing and hiring here in the United States as opposed to shipping jobs overseas, the plan to make sure that we continue to expand opportunities for young people, making college affordable, hiring a hundred thousand new math and science teachers, an energy strategy that says, yes, we're going to increase production of oil and gas and continue to cut our oil imports but also we're developing wind power and solar power that will create new jobs and help to clean our environment, and the plan to reduce our deficit in a way that's balanced so that we're not providing tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires that result in massive cuts in education or that would somehow turn Medicare into a voucher—those plans that I've put forward I'm confident can work, but they can only work with you.

So one thing that I saw in 2008 is that when the American people come together and decide that they are going to fight for the values and ideals that made this country great, we

can't be stopped. And I would urge everybody who is watching to look at my plan, look at Mr. Romney's plan, compare who has got a better answer for middle class families and everybody who's striving to get into the middle class.

And for the Latino community, I would say that the work that we've done on education, on immigration, on housing, on putting people back to work, on making sure that small businesses have access to financing—those are all issues that are representative of what you care about, your values. But you've got to get out there and you've got to make sure that you express that with your ballot.

So I would urge you to vote, and I would ask you to vote for me and Democrats up and down the ticket. I think it will deliver for you in the future.

Thank you so much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:15 p.m. at the University of Miami. In his remarks, he referred to U.S. Ambassador to Libya J. Christopher Stevens, Foreign Service Officer Sean P. Smith, and State Department security officers Glen A. Doherty and Tyrone S. Woods, who were killed in an attack on the U.S. mission in Benghazi, Libya, on September 11; President Muhammad Mursi of Egypt; Chairman Mustafa Muhammad Abd al-Jalil of the Transitional National Council of Libya; President Moncef Marzouki of Tunisia; 2008 Republican Presidential nominee John S. McCain III; Republican Presidential nominee W. Mitt Romney and Vice Presidential nominee Paul D. Ryan; and Michael E. Horowitz, Inspector General, Department of Justice. Ms. Salinas, Mr. Ramos, and the questioners from the audience spoke in Spanish, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Univision's "Encuentro con Barack Obama" town hall and a question-and-answer session in Coral Gables, FL.

Locations: Coral Gables, FL.

Names: Bush, John E. "Jeb"; Calderon Hinojosa, Felipe de Jesus; Clinton, Hillary Rodham; Doherty, Glen A.; Holder, Eric H., Jr.; Horowitz, Michael E.; Jalil, Mustafa Muhammad Abd al-; Marzouki, Moncef; McCain, John S., III; Mursi, Muhammad; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Pena Nieto, Enrique; Ramos, Jorge; Romney, W. Mitt; Ryan, Paul D.; Salinas, Maira Elena; Salinas, Maria Elena; Smith, Sean P.; Stevens, Christopher J.; Woods, Tyrone S.

Subjects: "Innocence of Muslims" film, protests; Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Arizona : Illegal immigration enforcement legislation; Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Strengthening efforts; Drug abuse and trafficking : Addiction treatment and reduction efforts; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Class size, reduction efforts; Education : Early childhood education programs; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Minority students; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: Community colleges; Education : Postsecondary education :: Pell grants; Education : Postsecondary education :: Student loans, elimination of subsidies to private providers; Education : Science and math programs; Education : Standards and school accountability; Education : Teachers; Egypt : President; Elections : 2012 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Florida : President's visits; Florida : University of Miami in Coral Gables; Foreign policy, U.S. : Diplomatic security, strengthening efforts; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Illinois : Chicago

Public Schools, teacher strike; Immigration and naturalization : Deportation rates; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Iraq : U.S. and coalition forces, withdrawal; Justice, Department of : Attorney General; Justice, Department of : Inspector General; Law enforcement and crime : Illegal arms trade, reduction efforts; Libya : Attack on the U.S. mission in Benghazi; Libya : Attack on U.S. mission in Benghazi; Libya : Democracy efforts; Libya : Transitional National Council Chairman; Libya : U.S. Ambassador; Mexico : Counternarcotics and drug interdiction efforts; Mexico : Counternarcotics efforts, cooperation with U.S.; Mexico : President; Mexico : President-elect; Middle East : Democracy efforts; North Africa : Democracy efforts; State, Department of : Secretary; Taxation : Tax relief; Terrorism : Al Qaida terrorist group; Tunisia : President; Univision.

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